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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the importance of teachers' intellectual and moral sensibility in informing their presence in the classroom, examining the dimensions of an intellectual and moral sensibility and noting how to bring together the terms sense and sensibility. The notion of an intellectual and moral sensibility brings reason and emotion together. The idea of sensibility underlines the importance of the way in which teachers think and act, rather than solely what they say or do. The paper discusses the impact of teacher sensibility, explaining that a teacher's classroom presence, shaped by his or her sensibility, can influence students' own evolving sensibilities. Teacher candidates can deepen their intellectual and moral sensibilities by learning how to read the world carefully and sympathetically. A moral and intellectual sensibility comes to life as candidates open themselves to the voice of the practice as embodied in the readings and experiences making up the teacher preparation program. The paper concludes that teachers' moral and intellectual sensibility, which must be cultivated, plays a dynamic role in whatever influence they have on students. A teacher education program can fund candidates' moral and intellectual sensibilities by expanding their horizons of understanding and feeling. (Contains 12 references.) (SM)

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Cultivating an Intellectual and Moral Sensibility as Teacher

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A teacher's intellectual and moral sensibility informs the kind of presence he or she has in the classroom. It funds his or her orientation toward students, toward subject matter, and toward the meaning of education. The qualifier "intellectual" highlights the degree to which reasoning, foresight, and curiosity guide the teacher's everyday conduct. The term helps capture the teacher's engagement with understanding the world of people and events. The qualifier "moral" underscores the degree to which the teacher's sensibility fuses humaneness with thought. The concept spotlights the teacher's attentiveness, concern, and respect, with those terms understood as constituents of a sympathetic attitude toward students and their learning.

In the first part of this paper, I will elucidate this conception in greater detail. Then, I will touch on how a teacher education program can initiate candidates into the career-long adventure of cultivating a sensibility that fuels students' and their own flourishing.

Dimensions of an Intellectual and Moral Sensibility

The idea of a person's "sensibility" calls to mind words like thoughtful, reflective, and unhasty. Jane Austen treats the term in that way in her well-known novel, Sense and Sensibility. One of her central characters, Elinor Dashwood, relies upon reflection and rational self-control to cope with life. She exercises foresight, prudence, and caution. In contrast, her younger sister, Marianne, embodies "sense." Her heart, her spirit, and her

passion rule her actions. Both women experience joy and despair. Their lives dramatize the consequences of depending either upon sensibility or sense to make one's way through the world. The conjunction "and" in Austen's title, as well as the outcome of her story, point to the value of trying to harmonize the two. Austen suggests that no life can be complete or balanced if it lacks either sense or sensibility.

Another way to bring the two terms together is to qualify them. For example, we could speak of sympathetic sensibility, meaning a quality of reasoning and foresight in which the welfare of other people, not just of oneself, is front and center. Or we could talk about thoughtful sense, meaning a form of emotion or feeling guided, or educated, by thought itself. This might mean, for example, that in the face of human loss and distress a person feels others' pain, but, at the same time, considers what can be done to alleviate the pain, and perhaps also what can be done to work on the conditions that have caused it. Nancy Sherman (1997), among other recent writers, argues that neither reason nor emotion alone can reliably guide people through difficult predicaments. Like Austen, she suggests that moral conduct depends on the person having cultivated both reason and emotion. The person must learn to let the two capacities mutually inform one another. Moreover, Sherman argues, this process pivots around the individual's agency. It cannot be forced or ordered by others. A school or school district cannot make a teacher be patient and attentive with students. Institutions have no jurisdiction over these aspects of a teacher's person and conduct. They hinge on the teacher's willingness to foster such qualities in him- or herself.

The notion of an intellectual and moral sensibility brings reason and emotion together. The qualifier moral merges what I have said about sympathetic sensibility and

thoughtful sense. A moral sensibility embodies a person's outlook on life and on the people and events he or she encounters. It describes how a person fuses humaneness and thought in the way he or she regards and treats others (cf. Confucius' Analects). A moral sensibility features a critical, or intellectual, orientation. It is neither blind nor sentimental. Rather, it embodies a reflective capacity, the ability to stand back from the scene at certain moments in order to discern the issues at stake and to appreciate differences in point of view that may be involved.[1] Such thorny moments occur time and again in teaching. However, a moral and intellectual sensibility does not trigger aloofness. To stand back from a classroom situation is not to stand apart from it. A moral and intellectual sensibility presupposes a quality of engagement. It implies involvement in the outcome of the issue or problem. It embraces the premise that how one approaches a situation influences not only students, but the person and teacher one is becoming.

The idea of a sensibility underlines the importance of the way in which a teacher thinks and acts, rather than solely what he or she says or does. For example, two teachers might provide the same instructions for a small-group activity, or identical explanations of a method for interpreting poetry. However, one teacher might be brusque and impatient, conveying the message that he does not trust or like his students. Or, he might perform in a blase or casual manner, signaling that he does not care about the outcome of the activity. Another teacher, offering the same remarks, might do so in an enthusiastic and supportive spirit, thereby expressing her involvement in teaching and her confidence in her students' power to learn. It is not hard to imagine which classroom students might prefer. Their

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[1] David Bricker (1993) and Shirley Pendlebury (1990) have employed the concept "situational appreciation" to capture this reflective capacity. Also see Jim Garrison's (1997) complementary discussion of what has been called "moral perception."

choice would reflect the fact that the teachers differ not so much in their technical knowledge or expertise as in their intellectual and moral sensibility. The terms that help capture the difference between the two teachers -- trust, care, support, involvement -- are saturated with moral meaning. They illustrate why we can speak of a teacher's moral presence in the lives of students, even if the teacher never thinks in those terms or employs the word "moral."

The Impact of a Teacher's Sensibility

Some examples of a teacher's influence can clarify and dramatize the meaning of a moral and intellectual sensibility. The philosopher Michael Oakeshott, for instance, describes how some of his teachers helped form his character as a person. He emphasizes that they did so indirectly, rather than through precept or admonition. He writes that

> if you were to ask me the circumstances in which patience, accuracy, economy, elegance and style first dawned upon me, I would have to say that I did not come to recognize them in literature, in argument or in geometrical proof until I had first recognized them elsewhere; and that I owed this recognition to a Sergeant gymnastics instructor who lived long before the days of 'physical education' and for whom gymnastics was an intellectual art -- and I owed it to him, not on account of anything he ever said, but because he was a man of patience, accuracy, economy, elegance and style. (Oakeshott, 1989, p. 62)

As a result of being with such teachers, Oakeshott began to realize that "there was something else in learning than the acquisition of information" (p. 62). He began to discern the sensibility of the individual in the role of teacher, just as he perceived that academic

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subject matter itself revealed human sensibilities. He learned these things not because they were a topic of instruction, but rather in "concrete situations" such as when historical facts were "suspended in an historian's argument," or when, while reading a passage of literature, he recognized "the reflection of a mind at work in a language" (1989, p. 62). Oakeshott discovered that "how" a person is, in the world, can carry as much weight as "what" a person is. Those terms are another way of attesting to the significance of a teacher's moral and intellectual sensibility.

The musician and musicologist Suzanne Hoover offers comparable testimony about her music teacher, Nadia Boulanger. In Hoover's experience, Boulanger was much given to direct pedagogy and moral exhortation. "[G]enius without character is nothing," Boulanger would say, while "character without genius is nearly everything. Untiringly, day after day, she preaches discipline and devotion" (quoted in Epstein, 1981, p. 99). However, what emerges most tellingly from Hoover's account is the power of Boulanger's sensibility. Her every word and gesture seem to express how to love music, how to devote oneself to its study, and how to reveal its wonders and meaning to other people. Boulanger shows Hoover the meaning of concentration, hard work, patience, deliberation, and the joy that can come from such engrossment. Slowly but surely, Hoover deepens these qualities in herself, to the point of anticipating her teacher's expectations even while exceeding her own. "As usual," she writes at one point,

> nothing specific had been assigned [by Boulanger] -- it was all up to me, and I knew what had to be done. . . I had decided that I would like to conduct the whole [concerto] from beginning to end; we had never considered more than one movement at a time. I worked, therefore, on the continuity. When I arrived at the

> lesson, N. B. asked simply, 'What are you going to do?' I said I would like to play and beat the whole concerto from memory, at the piano. That was, of course, what she had hoped I would do. So away I went -- no pauses, no interruptions, and a minimum of stumbling. . . When I had come to the end. . . she said, 'Well, and tell me -- don't you feel good?' (p. 100)

Hoover ascends not only in her musical knowledge and prowess. She grasps the enduring intellectual and moral impact her serious-minded teacher has had on her. She concludes her reminiscence by describing a concert Boulanger conducted in a centuries-old chapel:

> The musical climax of the service was the Salve Regina of Faure, . . . a quietly ravishing piece for soprano solo and instruments. N. B. was conducting it minimally . . . left hand resting elegantly on her hip, right hand making small arabesques in three-quarter time, when suddenly the soprano lost her place. An expression of despair spread over the singer's face. One understood instantly its cause: the sensation of having let N. B. down.
>
> Still beating, N. B. took a step to the right, toward the girl. Then, smiling serenely, she took up the beat with her left hand as she laid her right hand gently on the soprano's shoulder and sang the music softly to her as it went along. The girl looked into N. B.'s eyes, smiled back, and in a moment or two resumed singing and continued without the score to the end. . . [I]t is the memory of her in the chapel, conducting -- so totally given to the music and the moment, and at the same time so close to her students -- that will remain with me longest. (pp. 101-102)

Like Oakeshott, Hoover comes to understand something about the workings of a teacher's

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sensibility. She sees how her teacher embodied the very qualities that she now gazes upon with insight and gratitude.

If we turn to recent field-based research on teaching, as well as to teachers' reflections on their everyday work, we could multiply these kinds of examples. They would show how a teacher's classroom presence, which is shaped by his or her sensibility, can influence students' own evolving sensibilities. I hope these brief remarks illuminate the promise in the idea of cultivating an intellectual and moral sensibility as a teacher. I turn now to how a teacher preparation program can help bring this idea to life.

Cultivating Sensibilities through Teacher Education

My central claim here is that teacher candidates can deepen their intellectual and moral sensibilities by learning how to read the world carefully and sympathetically. By "world," I mean everything that might have a bearing on teaching: books, other materials, events, ideas, thoughts, gestures, feelings, failures, successes, aspirations, and more.

A serious-minded engagement with reading the world is crucial in teacher education because cultivating a sensibility implies a fundamentally transformative process, not one of simply accumulating information about teaching. In Oakeshott's (1989) evocative language: "A 'picture' may be purchased, but one cannot purchase an understanding of it" (p. 45). Teacher candidates cannot "buy" a grasp of teaching. They cannot "purchase" an understanding of why the persons they are constitutes the most important factor in whatever success they are destined to achieve in the classroom. To cite Oakeshott again: "the ancient Greek exhortation, Know Thyself, meant learn to know thyself. It was not an exhortation to buy a book on psychology and study it" (p. 28).

A moral and intellectual sensibility as teacher comes to life as candidates open themselves, in a critical spirit, to the "voice" of the practice as embodied in the readings and experiences that make up a teacher preparation program. This "opening up" involves a blend of listening and questioning. It means reading about teaching, in significant works from the tradition from Plato through Dewey, and in contemporary works that illuminate the intricacies and the significance of what teachers say and do. And it means reading in a philosophical rather than, say, a sociological fashion. It is to ask, as a teacher candidate, not How can I explain or categorize what Socrates and Dewey are talking about, or what today's teachers are up to? but rather: Should I teach as they do, or in the spirit which they advance? Is it possible, and desirable, that I follow their example? How can I follow when I feel I must make my own way? How did they make their own way? What should I learn from their example, and how can I learn from it?[2]

These questions are as much about oneself as they are about precursors. They "address" teacher candidates. They ask them to ponder seriously the terms of the work. They provoke them to think about their motivation and their ability to teach, and their willingness to take the necessary steps to learn how to perform well. The questions draw would-be teachers into the practice, while also positioning them to undertake the infinitely rewarding, career-long task of developing their own style and signature as teachers. This process involves thinking about concepts and meanings in teaching systematically, just as they will learn, if they are serious-minded about the work, to think about the classroom events of the day or week systematically. To paraphrase Jonathan Lear (1998, p. 8), such

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[2] The questions take inspiration, in part, from Alexander Nehamas' (1998) study of individuals he calls "philosophers of the art of living" (p. 4).

an outlook is "open minded." The outlook opens a window, for the teacher candidate, on what it means to learn to live nondefensively with the questions of how to teach and of how well one is actually doing at any given time.

With respect to the teacher education classroom, this orientation to reading the world pivots around three core questions: What does it [the text] say? What does it mean? and What difference does it make? The questions call on teacher candidates to learn to read with discipline, to interpret what they read, and to draw lessons from their engagement with it for their own outlook and action. The questions presume that worthwhile readings provide more than information alone (which is all some candidates seem to expect at the start of their programs). Rather, as mentioned previously, these readings address candidates. They pose questions and they articulate powerful ideas, and, in so doing, invite candidates to consider broader ways of thinking and acting. There is a logic to the sequence of questions, in that it is hard to know what difference a book like Dewey's Democracy and Education can make for teaching until one has studied it and generated an interpretation of it. This does not imply following the sequence in a wooden, mechanistic fashion. But the sequence can position teacher candidates to form an enlightened standpoint. After engaging the questions What does it say? and What does it mean? candidates can turn to questions I touched on previously, such as Am I willing to conduct myself in this way? Do I believe this? "And do I believe," adds Eva Brann (1999), "-- or reject it -- because I want to or because the matter compels me?" (Brann, 1999, p. 162). Brann means that shared inquiry centered around meaningful texts can lead persons beyond uncritical opinion, including the opinion that their outlooks possess automatic validity or truth.

Posed differently, this kind of inquiry -- if engaged in systematically in a teacher education program -- can enrich a candidate's emerging intellectual and moral sensibility. It can help candidates understand, rather than pay lip service to, the meaning of listening to others -- above all, to their future students -- in ways that are at once both critical and sympathetic. Richard Rorty (1983, pp. 165-170) illuminates the point in distinguishing between what he calls "moral" and "epistemic" privilege. According to Rorty, every person has the moral privilege to speak about and to interpret his or her own life and outlook. That privilege comes with being a person rather than a thing or, as Immanuel Kant would put it, merely a means to other people's ends. But moral privilege, Rorty goes on to argue, does not imply epistemic privilege. For example, my interpretation of a reading is not automatically true, warranted, or cause for action, simply because it is my interpretation. My knowledge, or what I think I know, does not have the same status as my personhood. As a person, I am always worthy of respect (presuming, one might add, that I do not go around harming other people). However, Rorty tells us, my claims to knowledge and understanding are not automatically worthy of respect. They must be talked out, examined or tested, considered in a public way.

As teachers would be among the first to point out, human beings differ widely in their willingness to question or reconsider their claims. Certainly, persons may have excellent reasons for adhering to a standpoint. But teacher educators are well-positioned, if they employ the kind of approach outlined here, to help candidates grasp the limitations and the seductions of what Joseph Schwab calls "self-measured judgment of self-held opinion" (1978, p. 131). This grasp can be of enduring value in candidates' work with their own future students. It can spur candidates to investigate how, in a sympathetic and

humane manner, they can help their students broaden, deepen, and enrich their intellectual and moral horizons.

Conclusion: Teacher Education and the Cultivation of Personhood

A teacher's moral and intellectual sensibility plays a dynamic role in whatever influence he or she might have on students. At the same time, a teacher has to cultivate a sensibility. It does not come prepackaged at birth. It is best understood as an achievement (cf. Oakeshott, 1993, p. 35). A person cultivates and refines it over the course of a lifetime. However, a sensibility is not like a muscle that can be built up steadily and predictably through weight-training, or a skill that can be picked up through mere repetition. A moral and intellectual sensibility takes form slowly and unpredictably. Most of the time, it is not a direct object of the person's attention or perception. Rather, it is funded, indirectly, by attending to people and to the situations in which they dwell. The individual's intentions, thoughts, feelings, and actions all figure into the equation. Each leaves a trace, however minute, on the individual's emerging sensibility.

Consequently, rather than focusing candidates' attention on their sensibilities, a process which might trigger self-consciousness rather than self-development, the wiser course for teacher educators is to engage candidates in experiences of learning how to read the world carefully and sympathetically. Such a program would include systematic reading, discussion, writing, and fieldwork, all informed by the idea that the personhood of teacher candidates is at stake, and, indeed, is the most important factor of all in being a good teacher. As I have argued, such a program can fund candidates' moral and intellectual sensibilities by expanding their horizons of understanding and feeling.

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